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The Socio-Political Impact of Labour Migration on Georgia

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CARIM-East
Creating an Observatory of Migration East of Europe

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of Labour Migration on Georgia**

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CARIM-East – Creating an Observatory East of Europe

This project which is co-financed by the European Union is the first migration observatory focused on the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union and covers all countries of the Eastern Partnership initiative (Belarus, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan) and Russian Federation.

The project's two main themes are:

- (1) migration from the region to the European Union (EU) focusing in particular on countries of emigration and transit on the EU's eastern border; and
- (2) intraregional migration in the post-Soviet space.

The project started on 1 April 2011 as a joint initiative of the European University Institute (EUI), Florence, Italy (the lead institution), and the Centre of Migration Research (CMR) at the University of Warsaw, Poland (the partner institution).

CARIM researchers undertake comprehensive and policy-oriented analyses of very diverse aspects of human mobility and related labour market developments east of the EU and discuss their likely impacts on the fast evolving socio-economic fabric of the six Eastern Partners and Russia, as well as that of the European Union.

In particular, CARIM-East:

- builds a broad network of national experts from the region representing all principal disciplines focused on human migration, labour mobility and national development issues (e.g. demography, law, economics, sociology, political science).
- develops a comprehensive database to monitor migration stocks and flows in the region, relevant legislative developments and national policy initiatives;
- undertakes, jointly with researchers from the region, systematic and *ad hoc* studies of emerging migration issues at regional and national levels.
- provides opportunities for scholars from the region to participate in workshops organized by the EUI and CMR, including academic exchange opportunities for PhD candidates;
- provides forums for national and international experts to interact with policymakers and other stakeholders in the countries concerned.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: <http://www.carim-east.eu/>

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Abstract

In this paper we use the secondary data analyses of existing statistical data-sources and findings of studies on migration for Georgia. We also use expert interviews conducted by ourselves and interviews with persons who have seen the migration of family members in order to investigate the social impact of labour migration on the country of origin in three different dimensions: social institutions, vulnerable social categories in society and different geographical locations. Special attention was paid, during field activities, to the new challenges induced by labour migration for traditionally vulnerable social categories including women, children and the elderly. We looked at the new strategies of these groups in avoiding marginalization from the country's developing socio-economic realities.

We find that the political and social outcomes of migration in Georgia are quite similar to the standard results of temporary labour migration for countries of origin presented in the migration literature focused across CIS countries. However, some other findings came up in our study including regional/geographical inequality, problems of the local labour force supply and deficiencies in migration and employment policy in Georgia.

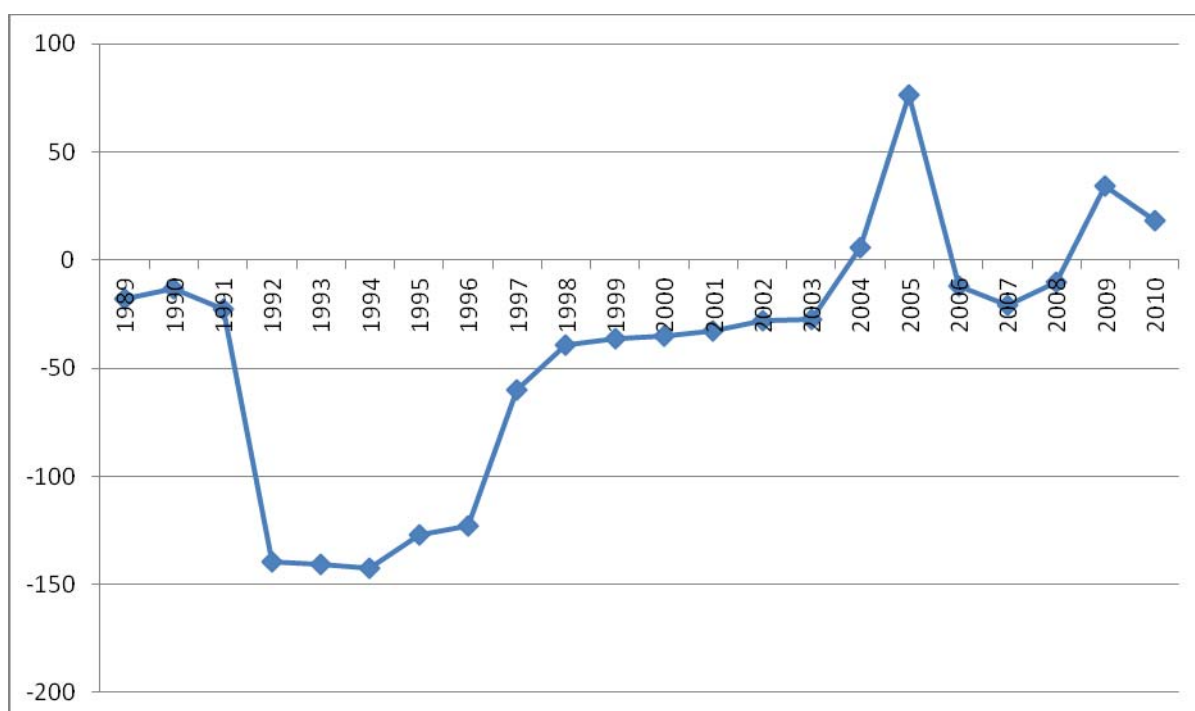
Labour migrant flows from Georgia are unlikely to cease in the near future despite the country's dynamic economic development, as the Georgian labour market is characterized by a sharp imbalance between labour supply and demand. And the remarkable numbers of returned migrants to Georgia aggravate this situation given the deficit of paid employment in this country. However, the Georgian government, being unable to provide most job-seekers in Georgia with proper employment and being unable too to secure the social support for unemployed, has not made sufficient progress in facilitating circular labour migration in Georgia. Nor has it secured the rights of Georgian workers with a proper national migration policy.

Introduction

According to the most recent IOM study, "...Georgia is primarily a country of origin of migrants with flows directed mainly towards the Russian Federation, the United States, Greece, Germany, Turkey, Austria, and other EU member states". (IOM, 2008, p.11). As a typical post-Soviet country Georgia has been seriously affected by out-migration since its independence in 1991. The last 2002 population census in Georgia registered a drop of some 20 percent as compared to the 1989 census. Part of this drop was due to the decline in fertility but most is the result of emigration. Since independence Georgia has had the second highest net migration, in proportional terms, in the Commonwealth of Independent States, second only to Kazakhstan (Mansoor and Quillin, 2007).

It should be mentioned that massive out-migration is a new phenomenon for Georgia. During the Soviet period ethnic Georgians tended to remain in Georgia. More than 95% of them lived on Georgian territory. Their migration was primarily within the republic towards the capital city - Tbilisi. "After the collapse of Soviet Union the citizens of independent Georgia got the chance to travel abroad without artificial impediments. During the first three years after independence Georgia was confronted with a number of dramatic civil wars. They brought about large flows of internal displacements and inflicted social-economic hardship on the whole population of the country" (Badurashvili, 2004, p.2). Conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s resulted in the internal displacement of approximately a quarter of a million people within Georgia. The overwhelming majority were ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia. The economy of Georgia in that time was paralyzed due to the lack of energy resources and a highly unstable political situation. Many Georgian citizens decided to leave their country to look for a better life elsewhere and emigrated in great numbers.

The official statistics on migration in Georgia is presented in Figure 1. As observed in the statistical data, a sharp increase in out-migration from Georgia occurred in the 1990s. The migration out-flow remained particularly high during 1992-1996. Later in the 1990s, international migration flows from Georgia stabilized with the negative net migration not exceeding 30,000 persons *per* year. The Georgian National Statistics Office insists that there is no evidence of large scale emigration from Georgia after 2000: "Since 2000 there is no evidence of further large scale migration, implying that those who wished to leave have done so and that those who are left are content to remain where they are. There is a steady stream of Georgians flowing out of the country but this is more than balanced by a net inflow of foreign nationals. On this evidence the population is now increasing rather than decreasing" (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2006, p. 10). As Figure 1 shows, since 2004 a reverse trend in net migration has been observed in Georgia, with some fluctuations in subsequent years and there is a positive balance between in- and out- migrants' flows for the most recent period.

Figure 1. Net-migration in Georgia (in thousands), 1989-2010

Source: 1989-1999: State Department for Statistics of Georgia, 2003, p. 67;

2000-2010: National Statistics Office of Georgia, http://geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=173&lang=eng,- assessed on 06 May 2012.

However, experts note that since the mid-1990s temporary labour migration – both internal and external – became a “nationwide strategy” (CRRC, 2007, p.10). Due to the restricted employment opportunities in Georgia people go abroad to earn money and to support their families at home. According to the results of the last available representative survey on migration¹ the number of migrants from Georgia abroad is estimated at approximately 140,000 people; another 138,000 are estimated to be returnees in Georgia. Hence, between 7% and 8% of the current Georgian population has experienced some kind of migration, i.e., either they are abroad or they have been abroad as migrants (CRRC/ISET, 2010, p.9).

No doubt, temporary moves abroad should be investigated carefully because they are numerous and massive in numerical terms. They include diverse groups and are tied to various socio-economic and political changes. Their influence on the overall socio-economic development of the country is significant. As seen in the decreasing possibilities for permanent immigration to most developed countries, these temporary moves abroad called by some “incomplete migration” (Okolski, 1997), are replacing traditional forms of migration. They will most likely be the dominant form of out-migration from Georgia in the near future since many developed countries increasingly need migrants.

The literature on the political and economic impact of migration on Georgia is already substantial. There are plenty of empirical studies based on household interviews in the last decade in Georgia. The most referenced study on labor migration in Georgia conducted in 2003 by IOM-Georgia surveyed the family members of 600 households with at least one member working abroad. Some data has been collected by the Georgian Department of Statistics both as a part of integrated household surveys (since 1996) and as a special migration survey of 1500 households organized 1999-2001 in the

¹ Survey of up to 1500 households in three categories (households with no migrants, households with currently absent migrants and households with returned migrants) conducted by CRRC at the end of 2008.

framework of project “Economic Barometer”. There are also some periodic surveys of households with migrants conducted by Georgian researchers (Chelidze, Tukhashvili, Zubiashvili etc.). All these sources, however, rely on relatives of the migrants reporting their migrant kin. This approach is pragmatic and offers a reliable picture of the impact of migration on the family. But, from our point of view, the data is not entirely reliable in terms of the realities of migrants abroad, including earnings, type of employment, etc.

Studies of returnees² offer a more accurate picture of the life of Georgian migrants abroad and of particular importance are the first-hand accounts of return and reintegration. In this regard it should be mentioned that the most recent study on migration implemented in the framework of the ArGeMi project allows us to analyze information collected through interviews with returnees in Georgia and migrants from Georgia in Moscow. However, its focus on Georgian migrants in Moscow and their problems limits the survey.

Recently in Georgia different categories of respondents have been interviewed: households with family members currently abroad and returned migrants themselves, in the special migration survey conducted by the Georgian Statistical Office in 2006 (N=1000). There was also a survey of the abovementioned categories of migrants including households with no migrants as in the case of the survey conducted by Georgian statisticians in 2008 (N= 7000). There was the aforementioned survey of 1500 households interviewed in 2008 by the Caucasus Research Resource Centres (CRRC) and there was also a household census conducted by IOM in Tianeti³ in 2008. This form of migration survey allows scholars to compare the economic position of families that are a part of and families that are outside the migration experience, meaning the impact of emigration on the economic status of household can be properly assessed. However, all these studies focused on the push and pull factors of migration from Georgia, the economic impacts of migration on migrant households, the experience of labour migrants abroad, and problems of their adaptation and employment upon their return. Some publications in Georgia, including those based on the results of abovementioned surveys, have been supplemented by the corresponding policy analysis that again is focused above all on the political impact of migration in Georgia.

Hence, although the political and economic effects of migration in Georgia have been extensively studied, its social effects on the country of origin have received less attention. However, these effects are very important and are closely linked to the political outcomes of migration on donor countries, because the temporary migration of the labour force negatively affects the national labour market and causes social inequality, mobility and stratification in society. The social effects of migration consist in a negative change in the composition of households, family separation and the abandonment of old people, negative child outcomes etc. These issues are not sufficiently analyzed in the existing literature and too little attention has been paid to the social impact of migration on vulnerable groups and new patterns in behavior and mobility adopted in coping with new challenges and realities.

This paper seeks to help fill the knowledge gap in this area. We have undertaken a comprehensive study of the scientific findings on these issues, the results of the secondary data analyses and in-depth interviews and discussions organized in the preparation of this paper. Employing these, the author will try to explain the extent to which temporary labour migration induces and responds to structural change in social institutions. He will also ask to what extent temporary labour migration contributes to new forms of social mobility and social inequality in Georgia. This will be done with special attention to the urban/rural divide, the intended and unintended consequences of labour migration and relevant policies on these social changes. We hope to provide research and policy recommendations for future

²Conducted by supervision of Irina Badurashvili in 2000 (Grant Project of Caucasian office of International Organization of Migration), in 2003 (Grant of Foundation for Population, Migration and Environment, Stafa, Switzerland) ,2005 (World Bank project “Enhancing Gains from International Migration in Europe and Central Asia”), and in 2009 and 2012- in framework of ArGeMi project funded by Volkswagen-Stiftung: Comparing out-migration from Armenia and Georgia.

³Settlement in a mountainous part of Georgia with the highest prevalence of migrants in the country.

scholars and policy-makers working on migration issues in the South Caucasian neighborhood of the European Union.

The paper is organized as follows. Chapter 1 summarizes the issues related to migration and employment policy in Georgia with a focus on recent and expected challenges caused by the unintended consequences of labour migration in Georgia. Chapter 2 investigates the emerging patterns of labour force structure and its new challenges caused by the efficiency of the current labour legislation in Georgia. Chapter 3 looks at the impact of migration on vulnerable groups including women, children and elderly people. Some analysis on the impact of migration on ethnic minorities in Georgia is also presented in this chapter. Chapter 4 tries to explain the peculiarities of the abovementioned processes in rural and urban areas of Georgia. And the fifth chapter provides research and policy recommendations based on the findings of our paper.

1. Migration and employment policy in Georgia

Experts state that Georgia currently has “...neither a migration policy nor legislation to regulate inward and outward movement of citizens despite the importance of migration for the country and the national economy. In addition, there is no control over employment agencies and labour migrants are not being registered” (CIPDD, 2009, p. 3). While this partly reflects capacity constraints and the lack of an appropriate infrastructure, it is also the consequence of liberal economic policies that the Georgian government has embraced. As a result, there are no legal mechanisms to protect Georgian labour migrants when their rights are violated. Indeed, a specific feature of Georgian labour migration is its illegality. While most Georgians enter countries legally, they end up as irregular migrants (CRRC, 2007, p.22). Accordingly, Georgian migrants usually rely on unofficial, and often illegal, migration, the reason why Georgian labour migration is relatively expensive. Georgian migrants use different methods to reach a host country and find a job there. Most of them are unable to get official work permits and work mainly on the “black” market (IOM, 2000; Badurashvili, 2005; People’s Harmonious Development Society and TASO Foundation, 2010). In this regard, it is important to mention that there are no bilateral agreements regulating the labour migration flows of Georgian citizens abroad. Numerous attempts to develop a labour migration law in Georgia have also failed for various reasons.

In the opinion of experts “...Georgia displayed patterns of inertia until late 2009 and complies only selectively with migration-related ENP-rules ... With regard to readmission agreements, Georgia made little efforts to sign a similarly dense web of bilateral agreements with EU or Schengen states” and up to 2009 had signed only 6 readmission Agreements with EU-MS or Members to the Schengen Agreement (Ademmer, 2011, p.11). As a result “... the European Commission bluntly expressed its dissatisfaction with Georgian migration policy in its progress report of 2008 criticizing the lack of a written policy document and the “extremely liberal nature” of the unwritten migration policy. The inertia that marked compliance patterns in Georgia has changed only recently. Georgia has started to display patterns of selective compliance since late 2009. The overall EC readmission agreement was signed in 2010 and took effect in 2011” (Ibid, p.12).

The Georgian government has expressed its intention to stimulate circular migration: “Georgia’s main priority is the facilitation of legal labour movement including agreement on labour and circular migration opportunities” (Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, 2010, p. 39). In 2009, Georgia together with the European Commission and 16 EU Member States moved into the implementation phase of the Mobility Partnership (MP), which is an important event encouraging circular migration. At present, however, the focus of MP implementation depends on the readmission and reintegration of forced returnees in Georgia and there is still no progress in circular migration facilitation.

Currently Georgia still does not have a written migration policy document. For the moment, there is a working group on “migration strategy” under State Migration Commission acting since the end of

2010 as an advisory body to the Georgian government and leading the working group to draft the migration strategy for the government. According to the information provided by experts from the International Organization of Migration (IOM) Mission to Georgia, the final draft version will be available soon and then shared with the international community and civil society for comments, before being sent to the government for approval.

The main obstacle for effective improvements in facilitating labour migration from Georgia, at least in the opinion of interviewed experts, is that the government has a liberal economic policy and does not consider any management of the labour market in Georgia to be necessary. The government, indeed, believes that the market economy will itself regulate labour migration. For now there is no appropriate infrastructure for labour market management in Georgia, no state employment agencies, no registration of the unemployed, no benefits for them, and no regular information on Georgian labour market supply and demand. Given these conditions, taking any effective measures for the facilitation of circular migration for Georgians seems to be impossible.

However, the Georgian office of the IOM considers the support of Georgian employment policy to be one of its main priorities, and devotes significant resources for the improvement of situation in terms of the management of the Georgian labour market through monitoring labor market dynamics in Georgia and through the facilitation of communication between employers and job seekers. Under the special Job Counseling and Placement Project (JCP), since 2007, the IOM has created an employment facilitation network in Georgia through its seven Job Counseling and Placement Centers strategically located through the country. The goal of the centers is to prevent illegal migration and to maximize the integration of returnees through an increase in employment opportunities. These centers usually accept not only returnees as clients, but also suggest support to every individual living in Georgia, makes selection and referral of job seekers providing too qualification/skills development and micro financing for them. As of today the IOM has already organized "...4 job fairs where the opportunity is given to both, employers and job seekers, to contribute to each other's requirements considering these events as a best way to reveal the reality of the labor market and shows a way to respond to its needs"⁴.

The IOM has worked hard to facilitate the effective functioning of the Georgian labor market. And this confirms that the IOM-Georgia, working in close collaboration with national government, considers an effective employment policy to be a crucial component in a successful migration policy for Georgia.

2. The Impact of migration on the Georgian labour market

Experts mention that labour migration in Georgia has had both positive and negative effects in terms of workforce supply to the labor market. Aside from the considerable socio-economic significance of migrant's remittances, its positive effects are addressed to the mitigation of the tense situation on the Georgian labour market, the involvement of the local labour force in the international division of labour and the development of a new labour culture among returnees. However, the negative effects of labour migration include a decrease in national population, a decline in Georgian labour potential and these are linked to the decrease in professional workforce skills and a higher risk of discrimination of illegal migrants from Georgia abroad (USAID and IOM, 2011).

Unemployment is a major determinant factor of poverty and labour migration from Georgia. Different migration surveys confirm that the overall majority of labour migrants from Georgia go abroad because they cannot find a job and because they fail to find self-realization at home. Despite the accelerated economic development of Georgia in recent years, the situation is still difficult in the country with regards to employment. The relevant statistical data and special surveys provide the grounds for this kind of an assessment.

⁴ http://www.jcp.ge/pdf/Project_Highlights.pdf

The last study of the European Training Foundation on labour market and employability has stated that Georgian labour market indicators have gradually worsened in the last decade (ETF, 2011).

In the opinion of experts (USAID and IOM, 2010, p.5), Georgia's labour market may, in general, be characterized by:

- Low employment and high unemployment;
- Limited breadth of enterprises;
- Dominance of the "secondary labor market" over the "primary market";
- High percentages of unemployed youth and persons with higher education;
- Low wages;
- Lack of regulation;
- Underdeveloped infrastructure;
- Inadequate elasticity in labour market;
- High percentage of long-term unemployment;
- Restricted mobility for professionals;
- Sharp imbalance between labour supply and demand

Aside of this, there are unusually high levels of economic activity among individuals aged 60-64 and over 65 on the Georgian labour market. This is not the result of migration among young adults, but rather poor state pensions and holes in the social security system. However, experts predict that the size of the economically active population will decrease in the future, as the current and anticipated changes in the age-structure of the Georgian population trigger a decline in the working-age population in the country; correspondingly, a considerable increase in the economic pressure of the population is to be expected, which will adversely affect the standard of living if employment and income is not considerably improved (USAID and IOM, 2011).

According to official statistics, unemployment in 2011 stood at 15.1%⁵, but there is a commonly held opinion that unemployment in Georgia is much higher than the official figures, combined with the added issue of underemployment. Official figures on the number of persons employed are, according to experts, artificially increased by including in the total number of employees those who are working in households free of charge and those who are helping family members. This category of employees in 2008,⁶ for example, consisted of 29.2% of the total number of the employed (USAID and IOM, 2010, p.8). Experts suggest that the quantitative supply of labor exceeds the capacity of paid work in Georgia at least three times over (USAID and IOM, 2011, p.18). According to the most liberal assessment the real unemployment rate in Georgia is 30-35% (ILO, 2010, p. 44).

It should be stressed that the Georgian government interferes little in labour market relations given its liberal philosophy. At the same time, the current Labor Code in Georgia does not comply with obligations taken up in the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy, as it does not protect employees' interests (ILO, 2010, p.45). As an expert from the International Labour Organization (ILO) informed us in an interview, the current Labour Code puts employers in a very advantageous position *vis-à-vis* workers: first of all, the current Labour Code does not sufficiently regulate working hours; then it does not oblige the employers to remunerate overtime; and allows employers to insist that people work longer. Besides this, the current Labour Code gives remarkable advantages to employers in hiring and dismissing staff. There are also significant gaps in legislation in terms of the health coverage for workers exposed to job-related accidents. In general, issues related to health insurance and the social assistance of workers did not find a place in the current Labour Code. The

⁵National Statistics Office of Georgia: http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=146&lang=eng

⁶ After 2008 Georgian official statistics no longer included this statistic.

completely private health insurance system in Georgia is quite a painful issue, as only 15% of the population is covered by voluntary health insurance policy. The state covers health insurance policy for socially vulnerable persons (living below poverty line and IDPs) and for some categories of public servants, like military personnel and teachers.

The position of the Georgian state and its insufficient employment policy make, experts believe, even working Georgians vulnerable and act as another push factor for labour migration.. At the same time it might create additional obstacles for the sustainable return of Georgian migrants and it might, likewise, motivate them to migrate again upon their return, as these people have adapted to European social and labour environments.

At the same time Georgian labour market experiences include both oversupply of labour force in terms of number and composition and shortage in terms of structure and quality. This results in significant mismatch between the demands of employers and the requirements of job-seekers. All research conducted by IOM-Georgia in 2007-2010 in order to analyze employers' demand for workforce demonstrated that even in conditions of mass unemployment, most employers have difficulties recruiting personnel with required occupations and qualifications. According to the most recent study: 34% of entrepreneurs in Georgia encounter problems recruiting required personnel; 54% of hard-to-recruit personnel are skilled workers; 31% are higher education specialists; and 2% are non-skilled workers; while 13% of employers encounter difficulties recruiting both working staff, and specialists with higher education. Experts mention that both objective and subjective reasons have created this atypical situation: objectively, few professionals are trained in Georgia; subjectively, employers do not offer acceptable salaries and employees choose not to work in certain localities (USAID and IOM, 2010, p.37).

However, our discussions with experts showed that they do not think that there is any shortage or abundance of specialists with particular skills in Georgia due to migration abroad. At the same time, experts discuss issues related to the "brain-drain" and "brain-waste" of Georgians, as the labour activity of Georgian migrants abroad does not correspond to their education and so migration cannot contribute to the improvement of human capital in Georgia. Available data shows that the work performed by Georgian migrants abroad usually does not correspond to their educational status. This holds particularly true for female migrants as in general they have higher educational status than male migrants. According to the survey on 500 returnees conducted in 2009⁷, only 5% of female returnees (against 20% of males) mentioned that the work they performed abroad corresponded to their education; one third of technicians and associated professionals were employed abroad as unskilled workers. Hence, migrants brought back skills that apart from the habit of proper working behavior (high responsibility, discipline, experience of communication and etc.) do not affect their professional level, as the professions they have acquired abroad will not further their career paths in their homeland.

Experts think that the scarcity of skill sets in the Georgian labor market was caused by a policy decision in the 1990s to drop the primary and secondary vocational education system in Georgia; nearly 20 years of inadequate training followed, and worker numbers plummeted. To solve these problems the Georgian government, in a recent period, made significant steps forward in settling up appropriate systems of vocational education in Georgia. The reforms contributed to the strengthening of its focus on the labor market. However, numerous problems still remain in different areas of vocational education in Georgia. In this regard it should be stressed that the higher education system in the country is much more developed than the primary and secondary vocational education system. It ensures the provision of professional personnel necessary for the labor market. However, unemployment and underemployment in Georgia stand particularly high among the young that indicates the difficulties young people experience when entering the labour market. According to the last ETF study on labour market and employability Georgia is distinguished from other countries in

⁷ In the framework of the ArGeMi project "Comparing out-migration from Armenia and Georgia" supported by the Volkswagen Foundation: <http://www.oei.fu-berlin.de/en/soziologie/forschung/ArGeMi/index.html>

the region by two features: the high unemployment rates among the young and the highest proportion of a tertiary-educated labour force compared with other countries in the region (ETF, 2010, p.15). It means that higher education is no longer a guarantee for labour market integration in Georgia.

Migration surveys found that the educational level of migrants from Georgia is higher than that of the national population in general (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2006). So we can conclude that better educated people are more likely to migrate from Georgia in search of work. Two factors caused this situation. First of all, it should be stressed that, during the last 15-20 years, the quality of the labour force in Georgia deteriorated drastically, as many qualified professionals lost appropriate jobs. In order to survive they took on labour activity not corresponding to their educational level and previous labour experiences. Many of them applied for work abroad, where a majority of Georgian migrants perform unqualified jobs. Hence, tens of thousands of specialists experienced a gap in professional activities and have suffered from partial or complete disqualification either in Georgia or abroad. Only a small share of them managed to adapt sufficiently to the new labour environments and became successful in a new professional career or acquired new skills while abroad. But due to the still non-existent system of validation of informal learning in Georgia these have not been acknowledged.

On the other hand, those young adults who, during these difficult years of transition, did vocational education in Georgia lacked a proper choice in terms of education quality and range of available professions. Under the conditions of reduced demand for the Georgian labour force most higher educational institutions were providing, in the 1990s, courses for the so-called “prestigious” professions to those in a position to pay for their education. The quality of teaching in these institutions and consequently the educational level of graduates, with some rare exceptions, was poor. Most specialists were not properly trained, even those many who graduated in the best Georgian universities did not manage to find an appropriate job in Georgia.

Some of these people migrated abroad for work. Those who stayed in Georgia created serious negative pressure on the Georgian labour market. The problem was that those uncompetitive and non-experienced youth specialists with “prestigious” diplomas would agree to any job and conditions of employment. Even the best graduates among them took positions not appropriate to their studies, in their search for any form of payment. But most of these “victims of transition” were working on positions that did not really correspond to their educational level and their professions, on the available work places, often part-time jobs and without any real hope of a proper career. Many are self-employed in the trade and rental sectors and are likely to be underemployed and prone to debts etc.

Recent studies on the labour market in Georgia confirm that a special feature of Georgia’s economy is the number of educated people in the population. Almost 40% of graduates are unemployed (USAID and IOM, 2010, p 11). Experts note that this apparent paradox can be explained by the failings of the market’s supply and demand mechanisms, especially for those seeking work in the limited “primary market.” These highly-educated people understandably wish to find work relevant to their training, but the market fails in this respect. The young are less likely than their elders to settle for a job in the “secondary market” that is poorly paid, does not meet the criterion for good working conditions, and that is not perceived to be relevant to their education.

Hence, many educated Georgians are likely to migrate due to limited opportunities in finding an appropriate job in Georgia. Those with experience from Soviet-era work have lost their skills as they have lost jobs. Those educated in the period of transition have had limited employment opportunities to improve a basic non-satisfactory level of professional education. These groups are forced to migrate for labour abroad. This choice is even starker now, as in the dynamic economic development in Georgia they find it difficult to integrate into the reforming labour market which demands either higher level professionals with compatible diplomas or skilled workers and technical associates, for which tertiary education is not required.

In the opinion of specialists, notwithstanding the temporary labour migration of Georgians abroad, the oversupply of labour force will not shrink in the near future. Indeed, according to available studies, labour migrants from Georgia stay abroad 2-3 years on average (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2006; CRRC/ISSET, 2010). Then they come back and become unemployed. Skills that they acquire abroad are not very useful for them upon their return. The jobs they perform abroad for earnings do not benefit them in Georgia and are not acceptable for them in their homelands. The money they send while abroad is used for everyday life by family members and migrants' savings are not invested in business activities. Rather they improve housing and life quality. So returnees also contribute to the oversupply of the labour market in Georgia.

3. Impact of migration on vulnerable groups

3.1 Women

During the Soviet period (1921-1991), almost fifty percent of those employed in Georgia were women. At the same time Georgian society saw women as those who should raise children, take care of the household, and preserve the traditional family spirit. Family for a Georgian woman has been a key agent in ensuring her personal happiness and welfare and her success in life.

Standards of living took a sharp downturn after the disappearance of the Soviet economy, when jobs formerly guaranteed by the state simply ceased to exist. As processing industries closed down and the export markets for Georgia's products collapsed, poverty increased in both urban and rural areas. This represented extra burdens on women, in their role as house-makers. The economic transition has left many Georgian women without work. Many women are left to work within the home; the share of unpaid labour is higher amongst women than amongst men. Many women still struggle with gaining employment that meets their educational level, as many employers do not want to hire women who they feel will soon leave to have children (Lie, 2012). In addition, those women in professional positions are paid less than their male counterparts. In the early 1990s, the average monthly salary of a woman was 75% of that of a man's; in the late 1990s, this wage gap was 52% and more recently it was estimated to stand at 48.6% (Tokmazishvili, 2007, p. 54).

Regardless, a higher rate of male unemployment has forced women to take on the role of breadwinners in addition to raising children and caring for the family. Overall, women, more often than men, take up multiple jobs, combining informal sector work with formal work, in addition to their caretaking duties in the home (Dragadze 1993). Hence, the poor state of the economy and stagnation in employment opportunities had a great impact on women. Gender inequality, in terms of the accessibility of resources, has become more acute in the transition to a market economy, and women's security and the protection of their labor rights have worsened.

In these conditions, migration became a survival strategy for many Georgian women and a last resort in order to overcome the economic difficulties that their children and families faced.

Experts found that in the new economic conditions, Georgian women manage to adapt better to the changing economic situation than men. They find new types of employment more easily than men, and they feel more responsible toward their families, while men remained apathetic and depressed (UNDP, 2008; Zurabishvili and Zurabishvili, 2010). A study of female migration from a small rural community in the Georgian mountain area Tianeti (IOM, 2009), gives the typical situation of female migration. Women rarely accompany their husbands; on the contrary, they are the only family members to migrate, though they may bring their husbands abroad after establishing themselves in the receiving country.

In this regards, specialists note that female emigration challenges traditional gender perceptions of the “divisions of labour and responsibilities; women become breadwinners and transnational mothers, whereas men lose their role as family providers” (Lundkvist-Houndoumadi, 2010, p. 53).

Of course, this process is painful for a traditional society like Georgia's. But participation in the local labour force is the norm for Georgian women, mainly because of Soviet labour policy. Instead, labour migration has traditionally been a male-dominated activity in Georgia. Hence, female migration presents a challenge to these traditional gender norms.

On the basis of semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in Tbilisi in 2007 with nine female international migrants who have returned to Georgia, Hofmann and Buckley came to certain conclusions about Georgian women. They were motivated by poverty and assisted by strong international networks when migrating abroad. They suffer too from local norms stigmatizing the absence of woman from the family and neglecting family responsibilities. “Two cognitive strategies for adapting to their norm challenging behaviour emerged from the interviews. First, all of the respondents see labour migration as their only available option for economic survival, rather than an active choice among various options. This was particularly true among women who did not have husbands supporting them. Second, most respondents were quick to differentiate their individual migration experience from situations linked to stigmatizing or “bad” migration” (Hofmann and Buckley, 2008, p. 24). Authors mention that in the interviews, women tended to speak less about the money they earned, and more about how difficult it was for them to be separated from their families, particularly from their children (Ibid, p. 15).

M. Lundkvist-Houndoumadi, who in 2008 interviewed female migrants from Georgia in Athens and carried out anthropological research in Georgia, reports on the inner conflict experienced by Georgian women migrants. These women are caught between traditional gendered expectations and actual practices. “...Narratives of condemnation and admiration of the emigrant women exist alongside each other. The women's own narratives often constitute ways of avoiding condemnation by trying to adapt the gendered expectations to their altered practices. The way the emigrated women describe their emigration is often a process by which they seek to justify their choices [...] It was generally reported by both men and women, migrants and non-migrants that females are better migrants than males because they can earn and send more money home” (Lundkvist-Houndoumadi, 2010, p. 51).

In order to (re-)gain respectability from the family left apart, Georgian female migrants try hard to justify their separation from the family and in particular their children by sending more money more frequently. In order to be able to contribute more to the financial support of their family members, women: deprive themselves of basic needs; they do not take days off; they limit their private expenses; they work extra hours; they take extra weekend jobs, etc.; thus they often end up with serious psychological and health problems (Zurabishvili, 2010, p. 78).

Available studies show that women who spend a long time abroad experience particular difficulties in reintegration and adaptation in their homeland after their return. They also experience problems in adaptation to the differences existing between the social and cultural conditions in Georgia and abroad, especially obvious in peripheries of Georgia with low developed infrastructure. Hence, they wish to migrate again. According to the survey of returnees conducted in 2009-2010, 37.5% of the female returnees from Greece wish to leave the country once more (People's Harmonious Development Society and TASO Foundation, 2010, p. 47).

Another important issue related to social impact of migration on Georgian society is its impact on women left behind. Available studies on migration in Georgia show that due to high costs of migration and visa problems usually only one family member leaves and remits money back to Georgia.

According to the 2005 World Bank Survey on returnees⁸ up to 85% of interviewed persons have left to go abroad, with no other household member accompanying him/her. Hence, for spousal couples the migration of one partner means that the two are often kept apart from 2-3 years, the average length of migrant's stay abroad (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2006; CRRC/ISSET, 2010). Labor migration from Georgia often causes, then a situation where spouses live separately for a long period and it might result in the worsening of partners' relations and separation.

Unfortunately, there are no studies in Georgia allowing us to analyse the issues related to the impact of migration on women left behind, their families their behaviour and their position in an extended family, on emotional well-being and personal problems. However, several interviews conducted in the preparation of this report lead to some observations.

One woman, thirty-five-years old N., told us that 3 years ago her husband left for England and she stayed in Georgia living together with two children and his parents in one household. Relations between family's members were normal, before the migration of her husband but when he left relations with her parents-in-law worsened. They argued frequently concerning the money her husband sent from abroad: how much should be spent, who should decide how it was used, who should be the main beneficiary etc. Finally, relations in the family became so strained that she left together with her children. This decision was not surprising for her husband who is still in England. He continues to support his parents and no longer has contact with her. She supposes that he has somebody there, so he does not try to preserve his spouse and children in Georgia.

Another respondent fifty-eight-year old Ts told us her unhappy experiences. Nineteen years ago her husband left to work in Russia while she and her two children stayed in Georgia. He came back after seven months the first time and then left again. During the first few years they were regularly in contact and she planned to join him in Russia. Slowly though the contacts became rarer and finally ceased. She visited him in Russia with the children, took some money from him and came back with the hope that everything would be alright. However, after eight years of living apart he asked for a divorce explaining that it was a necessary step for legalizing their marriage in Russia. However, very soon she learnt that he had another wife there. Now she is alone, her children are already adults (26 and 25) and have grown up without a father and though he does not have any children in Russia relations between children and father are strained. He did not even come to his daughter's marriage though he was invited by her. His son says that he will never forgive his father.

One woman we invited for discussion because she had, as an interviewer, participated in several migration surveys told us: "If you want to lose a husband let him migrate to Russia!" She told us several stories that she had heard from the respondents during the surveys and people in her close surrounding concerning Georgian men living in Russia with second families there: "Their wives cannot accompany them because the children study here, in Georgian schools. Being alone Georgian men are free, they do need to be cared for and even if they do not all marry they all have partners in Russia. Some Georgian women do not care, but for many this situation is extremely stressful. A twenty-seven year old friend with two children first joined her husband who had a successful business in Moscow. But later she had to come back to Georgia, as her children could not manage to adapt to their new environment: there was a problem with Russian at school etc. And what now? She lives in Georgia; her husband works in Moscow; she is bitterly jealous about him, calls him several times each evening and tries to control him from Georgia, asking why he was late yesterday... We (*her friends*) tell her that she is practically crazy and she says that she will become so if she does not manage to get him to come home. But what will he do here? The business he has in Moscow will not be successful here and the children need too much. So she is very depressed. She wanted to find a job here, but her mother-in-law did not allow her to and convinced her husband that it would be better not to allow her to work, as she is very nice and having new people around she may pay attention to other men".

⁸The data are calculated by authors from the database of a survey on 1200 returnees conducted by the WB in 2005 in the framework of the project "Enhancing Gains from International Migration in Europe and Central Asia".

3.2 Children left behind

Separation of a child from one or both parents represents the most traumatic effect of international migration. Labour migration from Georgia also causes a situation where minors stay under the care of single parent due to the temporary migration of second parent supporting a family from abroad. The situation of children is worse when a single parent (usually a mother) going for labor abroad leaves her children under the foster care of other family members and relatives. Migration studies show that divorced women in Georgia are more likely to go abroad for work than those with a spouse⁹, as this category of women in Georgia might have more incentives to go abroad to earn. It means that minors are at risk of being left alone.

There are no official data in Georgia concerning children left behind by their parents. However, cases of mothers leaving minor children behind with their relatives seem to be frequent. As stated by Zurabishvili on female migrants from the village of Tianeti "...similarly to other cases of female migration – such as Central American, Mexican and Caribbean – female migrants from Tianeti become 'transnational mothers', taking care of other people's children and leaving their own children in the care of husbands and/or other members of their families, such as grandparents" (Zurabishvili, 2010, p. 78). The share of women who have left their husbands and families in Georgia among the total number of female migrants is estimated by experts to be as high as 35%, of whom 37% have children (Jashi, 2010, p.3). Hence, having the children in Georgia does not seem to impede migration of mothers.

According to the special study implemented by USAID on the gender situation in Georgia, specific economic, social and migration factors have altered the sustainability of family structure and they have changed gender roles. Consequently, parental influence on children and young people has weakened, something seen in the growth of juvenile delinquency and problems associated with homelessness and begging (USAID, 2003, p.39).

The results of one small-scale qualitative research project¹⁰ devoted to the study of the psycho-emotional impact of migration on children left behind in Georgia have confirmed a heavy negative impact on the emotional well-being of those children. This is the case even when there is sufficient care provided by care-givers, namely the members of extended family or close relatives: "Conducted analysis revealed that children demonstrate separation anxiety by different behaviour, such as crying and whining, clinginess, silence, extreme shyness, protesting going to kindergarten, truancy, low interest in schoolwork and consequent disruption in academic performance, unwillingness to interact with other people including peers, disobeying school rules and fighting, anxiety and irritation, difficulties to go to sleep/nightmares, and stomach problems. The analysis also revealed that although separation anxiety significantly lessens several months after separation from parent(s) children never completely recover from distress caused by parental migration, particularly by maternal one" (Svintradze and Ubiria, 2007, p.20).

Interviews conducted with Georgian women-migrants in Greece have shown that migration of women sometimes raises the problems not only with minor children: "Often the boys left back in Georgia find themselves under the unfavourable influence of the street. We have a lot of cases when grannies call the parents asking them to return not being able to handle the situation any more... One of the woman's respondents told that her daughter get married when she was away. Being left all alone with her problems she decided to get married "to get a foothold in her life" (People's Harmonious Development Society and TASO Foundation, 2010, p. 39).

⁹ According to migration surveys the proportion of divorced/separated women among migrants from Georgia is as much twice higher than among all women of corresponding age living in Georgia.

¹⁰ In the framework of study supported by CRRC-Georgia in 2007 6 families with children aged from 6 to 18 left with migrated parents were interviewed. In-depth interviews were conducted with eight children in total, their parents and extended family members/surrogate caretakers.

Several in-depth interviews conducted with young people experiencing the migration of their parents have confirmed the conclusions made on the basis of desk-research presented above. Our first respondent is a twenty-one-year-old girl (A.), who mentioned that in her life she had only lived together with her mother for the first five years. First, her parents both left when A. was four-years-old and when they were leaving she did not understand what was going on. Her parents left her with her paternal grandmother who was very warm, but A. missed her mother so much. "When my grandmother played with me the most typical game was that we imagined that we were going to my mother to Greece, she does not expect us, we knock, my mother opens a door, embraces us and we live together there". After several years her parent returned and shortly after left again because they did not find any income opportunities in Georgia. In that time when they were leaving again A. was depressed, she asked them to take her with them, but they could not as they were going to enter Greece illegally because her father has been deported from there before. A. told us that she experienced a lot of emotional troubles during her childhood due to the absence of her mother; she tried not to be close to her schoolmates and avoided contacts and discussions over personal matters, when somebody offended her she thought that that was because she did not have a mother here. She did not like to speak about it with anyone, even with her grandmother. She wrote her feelings in a diary, but later when she read her notes she became very upset, so she threw them out. "If I had a brother or sister maybe I would not feel myself so alone, but I was so alone, my mother was not present at the main events in my life, when I first went to school, when I completed school with high grades, never... ". Now her mother is still in Greece, they are in contact almost every day by Skype. Her mother regularly sends her money for studies and for living expenses. Her father returned two years ago, because he could no longer find a job in Greece, but A. explained that it means nothing for her: "For a girl her mother is the main person in her life and I am so unhappy that she was never with me when I needed it. Each time she calls I want to cry, I blame her that she has left me alone in this life, she could have taken me with her and I would be there overcoming all difficulties together with her!" A. dreams that she will go to Greece and see her mother, as her mother still lives and works illegally in Greece she cannot visit Georgia. A. tried to obtain a tourist visa to Greece but was refused by the embassy.

Another respondent is a twenty-two-year old girl M. who lives together with her fourteen-year-old brother in the family of her aunt. Their mother left for Greece five years ago. The reason for migration in this case was a conflict in the family: they shared a household with their paternal grandmother, who constantly argued with their mother and caused conflicts between the parents. All of them were so depressed with this situation that their mother decided to migrate in order to buy separate accommodation for the family. M. recalls that, at first, she was even happy that all these conflicts ceased. However, soon after the mother's migration the children had to move to the family of the mother's sister, as she could not continue to live with her grandmother and father who always backed his mother in all matters. Their mother was very upset by the father's position and M. thinks that when she gets back the parents will separate. M. takes a lot of time caring for her brother like a mother; her brother was just 9 years old when their mother left. In that time she promised to come back in one year, but she did not come as she had work there and she sent M. money for living expenses and for her studies at university; sometimes the mother sent some money to her husband as well. She is also saving money to purchase her own apartment; otherwise she says that she will not return. In the last while M's brother has caused a lot of problems. She cannot control him anymore, he does not want to go to school, to do homework and he spends time out in the street with shady friends etc. He is very angry that his mother left him that he spent the whole childhood without her; he says that he does not need her money anymore as she is not a good mother. M. called their mother and told her that it is becoming more and more difficult to control her brother and she is worried about people in the neighbourhood. But, at the same time, she can't bring herself to tell her mother the whole truth as she understands that there is no choice for her mother besides being there and earning money.

Another story we have heard while preparing this paper is about a thirty-three-year-old woman, who migrated to France two years ago who left her son in Georgia. This woman has already experienced the negative impact of migration, as her husband migrated to the US 10 years ago with a

promise to take her and their son later. Their son was four-years-old in that time and they were in a difficult financial situation; which is why her husband decided to leave and support his family from abroad. However, very soon he ceased contacts with her family in Georgia, failing to send them money and after some time she came to know that he was living with another woman. So when 2 years ago she had an opportunity to go to France she left promising to take her son later. But very soon she married in France and did not want to bring him to her “new” life any more. The boy left by both parents with his grandparents in Georgia has suffered a trauma, he has lost both parents. He was particularly sad about his mother as he trusted her and could not imagine that she would leave him alone. His grandparents have taken care of him trying to help him to overcome his emotional problems and recently his father took him to the US.

3.3 The Elderly

The impact of emigration on the elderly left behind by emigrant children is a particularly serious concern in Georgia. However, the subject has been very unevenly studied. This has been demonstrated by our Georgian coordinator of the project “Effects of migration in Moldova and Georgia on children and the elderly who are left behind” implemented by the University of Maastricht, Maastricht Graduate School of Governance with the support of the European Commission together with local partner in Georgia, International Center for Social Research and Policy Analysis. Unfortunately there are not yet any outputs, but the coordinator of the project Ms. Elene Chikhladze provided us with some preliminary observations. This is based on qualitative research implemented by two private elderly institutions and fieldwork by the representative survey on 4000 households in different regions of Georgia. In these private institutions there are many old persons as they no longer have accommodation because their children sold their houses and migrated. Their children, as a rule, have not contacted them for a long time. However, the elderly did not, while being interviewed, tell interviewers that they had been abandoned by their own children, as this is a stigma issue in Georgia.; They said, instead, that their children are not able to come to Georgia and see them, as it is too expensive, they live too far away etc. Ms. Chkeidze has mentioned that elderly parents left behind by their children are an especially vulnerable group – the Georgian state provides no pensions. She did not know before and was surprised during the project’s activities how many old people in rural areas live alone, because their children have migrated. Some of them care for young grandchildren left behind and it is a difficult job for them, emotionally-speaking but also economically.

In the opinion of experts in Georgia, the impact of emigration on the elderly still does not raise serious concerns in Georgia, as the rights of aged parents are not sufficiently provided for by national legislation. However, in the limited institutional arrangements for the elderly in Georgia (there are just two-state owned homes for the elderly with limited capacity) the problems of alternative elderly-care providers in the case of children migrating abroad are an issue of serious concern.

3.4. Ethnic minorities

As with many post-Soviet republics, non-Georgians constituted the biggest flow of emigrants from Georgia in the first half of the 1990s. Georgia was historically a place of considerable ethnic diversity, and when Soviet-era restrictions on migration eased, migration among Georgia’s ethnic minorities grew. In the late 1980s, Greece offered residency rights to anyone proving Greek descent, leading about one third of Georgia’s 95,000 ethnic Greeks to emigrate by 1993 (de Waal, 1994). Similarly, large-scale migration of Soviet Jews to Israel included many Georgian Jews. These ethnically-motivated migration flows created social networks linking Georgians to former compatriots in Israel, Greece, and other countries.

As a result, the share of ethnic minorities in Georgia “...shrank from 29.9% in 1989 to 16.2% in 2002.” (CRRC, 2007, p.8). Some western authors use this fact as an example of ethnic intolerance (Beissinger, 1996, p. 158). In this regard, the specialists in Georgia point out that “...on the eve of

dissolution of USSR, Georgia was being led by political newcomers, an inexperienced elite who tried to establish themselves at the helm using the easiest possible way – political slogans. But some influential representatives of political elite managed to use the slogans so that patriotism became perceived as unrestrained nationalism. In those days several statements made by political figures concerning ethnic non-native population, which influenced mass consciousness, caused the feeling that a sharp rise in intolerance happened. Uncertain and anxious, the people of different ethnic groups who did not feel themselves to be “native” decided to emigrate” (Gachechiladze, 1997, p. 27).

The migrant flows from Georgia towards the Russian Federation, immediately following Georgia’s independence, were also of ethnic character. They comprised mainly ethnic Russians who had previously moved to Georgia from Russia or were born to Russian immigrants. But, gradually, the share of ethnic Georgians migrating to the Russian Federation increased given the economic situation, as living standards in Georgia declined below those in Russia.

Some ethnic communities in Georgia are still more involved in migration processes than others. They have transformed migration into a coping strategy for their families. For example Armenian and Azeri males of working age, compactly settled in South Georgia, tend to engage in seasonal migration to Russia, usually for construction and trade. A significant proportion of working-age men from these communities travel every year to Russia (generally early spring) to work as manual laborers (typically in the construction sector). Despite the recent deterioration of relations between Russia and Georgia, this is ongoing, because most of the migrant workers have obtained either Armenian or Russian passports. While Georgian citizens face draconian restrictions if they want to visit Russia, Armenian citizens can enter relatively easily. Although ethnic minorities on average tend to be less educated than ethnic Georgians, the economic motivations and strategies for migration are similar. Both communities migrate through economic necessity; for ethnic minorities, it is viewed as a mainstream strategy rather than a last resort. And while Russia is the traditional destination for ethnic Azeris and Armenians, Greece has now become a destination country for them as well.

Experts note that since the mid-1990s ethnic minorities in Georgia have tended to use seasonal/circular migration to Russia as a primary household economic strategy: “Ethnic Armenians and Azeri in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli often used external migration as a primary income generating strategy” (CRRC, 2007, p. 22). The Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions are situated in the South Georgia, which is populated by ethnic minorities representing more than a half of the regions population. 55% of the ethnic minorities on Georgian territory (controlled by the Georgian government) reside in these two regions. The main ethnic minority in Samtskhe-Javakheti are Armenians, while in Kvemo Kartli – Azeris. One of the key issues for the ethnic minorities of Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli is a weak knowledge of the state language. This appears to be one of the reasons for low internal migration from these regions. The main features that distinguish these communities from ethnic Georgians are: the type of migration – seasonal migration – which dominates; greater isolation from programs and information and the lack of highly-skilled or education migration from the communities. It should be mentioned that these regions have a long-standing tradition of labour migration; in the Soviet time some male Armenians from South Georgia used to Russia to work. They were leaving Georgia every spring, jobbing as contract workers in Russia (so called “shabashniki”) and then they returned to their families in autumn. The same is true for the Azeris living in the rural areas of the Kvemo Kartli region. Findings of a Russian survey about immigrants from Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan prove the high proportion of remittances sent from Russia to the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia: in regional comparison of ten administrative units in Georgia, Samtskhe-Javakheti with 18% of the polled recipients tops the list of remittance-receiving areas (EBRD, 2007, p. 63).

4. Labour migration in urban and rural areas

The economic crisis that took place in Georgia in the 1990s caused enormous changes in the Georgian economy and a reduction in available employment opportunities at the factories and industries located in urban areas. This led to a decrease in rural-urban migration, and even flows of people moving from cities to rural areas have been observed. These processes became more apparent with the initiation of land privatization in Georgia in 1993, when many residents of Tbilisi (capital-city), originally being from rural settlements, returned to their places of origin and tried to become farmers (Tukhashvili, 1996, p. 33). The same conclusions are made on the basis of the results of migration research focused on the region of Imereti in the West of Georgia, describing how, with the socio-economic crisis of the 1990s, not only rural-urban migration flows have been diminished, but reverse flows to rural areas have been mentioned in this period as well. Authors of the study note that 86.5% of migrants who moved to Imereti in the 1990s were from Tbilisi and other urban areas in Georgia (Beridze and Chipashvili, 2001, p.171).

Those most suffering from the 1990s economic crisis were Georgian industrial cities and towns, were characterized by intense population flows after the re-establishment of the independence of Georgia. Former Georgian industrialized rural zones, which during Soviet times developed into industrial centres, lost their function after the sudden cessation of economic activity. Examples include the cities of the Imereti region: Kutaisi, Tkibuli and Chiatura in West Georgia and the major city of the Kvemo Kartli region - Rustavi (a former city of metallurgy industry) in East Georgia. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, all state activities ceased in Georgia and after the first waves of departure of ethnic Russians concentrated in these industrialized areas, the native population also started to migrate in significant numbers towards Tbilisi and out of Georgia to find jobs. The majority of households who had maintained a house in rural areas, returned to their villages where there was more possibility of nutrition in those times. Landru describes the situation in Tkibuli as “the skeleton of abundance” and explains: “the completely empty houses are evidence of the departure of whole families, particularly for the suburbs of Tbilisi, if the heads of the households found employment there in construction or as salesmen. But if their education allows them - that is, if their language abilities allow them - they leave their families in the countryside to find resources abroad, generally in Russia” (Landru, 2006).

After the stabilization of the political situation in Georgia in the second half of the 1990s, migration flows directed from rural to the urban areas again started to grow. And now each year around 8,000 to 9,000 persons from rural and other urban settlements arrive in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, for permanent residence¹¹. That means that the population of Tbilisi now grows by almost 1% per year due to new arrivals¹². Keeping in mind that these figures represent only those who officially declared their change of permanent place of residence, the real scales of urbanization in Georgia might be significantly higher.

Urban and rural lives in Georgia differ greatly. Urban life is characterized by a great variability in labour and better social infrastructure, educational opportunities and entertainment, not to mention the direct preference given by the Georgian government to urban settlements. Rural Georgians are in general economically vulnerable, as productivity is low, underemployment and unemployment rates in the sector are high, and income is inadequate¹³. As more and more male family members leave rural areas, predominately go to Tbilisi, and, indeed, leave the country to search for work, the number of households headed by women is increasing in rural areas. Overall, and especially in rural areas, households headed by women with children are particularly vulnerable to poverty, as rural women

¹¹ Civil Registry of Georgia: http://www.cra.gov.ge/files/45_47_967221_2006_2009_migracia_tbilishi.jpg- accessed on 21 May, 2012

¹² Population of Tbilisi is slightly more than 1 million persons.

¹³ <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/georgia> - accessed on 25 May 2012

have fewer employment opportunities and comparatively lower wage levels. A breakdown in social services and unreliable public utility infrastructures, due to the shifting economic and political situation, only add to women's burdens. For many women in rural areas within Georgia, the response to the current economic pressures has been migration. They head for urban centres to seek employment, predominately Tbilisi, away from their family and kinship networks (Cahill, 2009, p.58).

The social and economic crises of the 1990s have eroded previous gender gains. Although women have equality under the law, in practice Georgian families are strongly patriarchal, especially in the rural areas of Georgia and women are traditionally considered homemakers. In certain districts, such as Mtskheta-Mtianeti and Kakheti women are four times as likely to be poor than elsewhere¹⁴.

As a rule, as a result of rural-urban migration villages are abandoned by the younger generation, as they have no working or learning opportunities there, which causes labour force drain from rural areas. Impact of migration of this kind is especially severe for small villages in the mountain areas of Georgia. They are either emptied completely or left with only small populations consisting of the very elderly. In small villages causes the closing of primary and secondary schools, consequently in Georgia there are rural settlements where there is no school. In this case families have an additional motivation for migration. So one of the reasons of migration of this kind is a lack of infrastructure: roads, schools, healthcare institutions, markets for selling agricultural goods, etc. On the other hand, large cities (especially Tbilisi), are getting larger and larger, with more and more people: this causes a strong asymmetry between rural and urban populations and, therefore, prevents rural areas from developing.

The mountain areas of Georgia are distinguished by intensive depopulation which started long ago and accelerated with poor socio-economic conditions in the last decades. Weakly developed production, lack of fertile lands and difficult climate conditions force the population of the region as a whole to leave their dwellings and to move to another region to find jobs. Those villages which are still inhabited are mainly populated by elderly people and if no measures are taken, they might be abandoned as well. For example, in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region every tenth village is abandoned and less than twenty people live in the rest of the villages. Almost 56% of households in the villages of the Racha-Lechkhumi region consist of one or two, mainly elderly members¹⁵. Tianeti, a small settlement in the mountains (in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region) is most often referred to as an example of particularly high emigration. The special migration study implemented in 2008 has detected that one third of households there reported having at least one adult currently abroad (IOM and IFAD, 2009).

The elderly left behind by their migrating children are also especially vulnerable in rural areas. First of all for old people in villages it is more difficult to arrange their everyday life and social environments; one expert told us in an interview that the elderly living alone in rural Georgia have not heard of social workers, they know nothing about family doctors and they have never seen a doctor at all. Even those having a health policy covered by the state do not know how to use it, where to go for consultancy etc. Those who live with their adult children are better-off from this point of view, as young people are usually more aware of state programs on health care and insurance policy. The level of education is not always sufficient among old people and so they have a lack of knowledge about services provided to them by the state. If there are no more or less educated people or adult child-caring they usually miss even those limited opportunities provided for them by the state.

5. Policy and future research implications

Desk-research has shown that there is a lack of knowledge in Georgia on the social impact of migration on local society, especially concerning issues related to its negative impacts on the stability of family and partnerships, on problems with socialization and the emotional well-being of children

¹⁴ See footnote 12

¹⁵ Calculated by author on the basis of data from the Georgian population census of 2002.

living apart from their parents and the position of women/men staying along during migration of their spouses. Future scholarly research on migration in Georgia should be more focused on these issues: with widely disseminated results and public discussions and policy initiatives on the mitigation of negative social impacts of migration not to mention the implementation of appropriate measures to secure the interests of migrants' families.

Past migration research in Georgia has focused on the way migrants fare in the host labour markets. Now it is very important to investigate why Georgian returnees do not manage to adapt upon return to their homeland. Why are they not able to integrate into the local labour market and why do they experience difficulties and why are they so likely to become migrants again? As the limited developmental impact of migrants' remittances in Georgia is already an accepted fact it is important to find a way to increase the remittances outcome not only at the household's level, but also at the level of local communities, as there are still many problems in overcoming rural poverty in Georgia.

According to studies 7-8% of Georgian population has experienced labour migration and temporary labour migration still acts as a national wide strategy for a significant portion of households in Georgia. It is, therefore, important to initiate public discussions concerning social guarantees for Georgian migrants upon their return.

Social guarantees of migrant workers' rights in the country of origin of migrants are closely linked to the opportunity for them to use the schemes of portable social contributions in the country of destination. Current state pensions in Georgia are more like social assistance, as a pension is granted in Georgia to all individuals reaching retirement. Pensions do not take into account either the pension contribution that has been made throughout their working life or the duration of their activities, type and quality. According to experts the current pension system poses a lot of problems for the financial sustainability of Georgia and development prospects and, therefore, it is vital to establish a new pension system, which must be based on accumulation schemes (CIESR, CEPR, OSGF, 2011). This new system obviously will take place in Georgia in the future and in this case most Georgian labour migrants are at the high risk of leaving behind social security in their country of origin. So policy makers in Georgia should take into account the interests of migrants in the development of national social policy. The experience of other countries should be applied in this regards.

In the future, given the quantitative reduction of Georgia's labor potential, the qualitative improvement of the workforce through the introduction of vocational training and lifelong learning principles will be especially relevant. In the opinion of experts the existing system of VET is still not able to meet the requirements of various sectors. Hence, overall, despite the positive trends that have been observed in developing vocational education there is still a need to focus on the labor market, and to improve training quality. In this regard Georgia must establish a system of skill recognition and validation for migrants-workers in order to make the developmental impact of migration clear.

The appropriate system for the social security of vulnerable groups should be more oriented to those marginalized due to migration. Civil organizations, NGOs, society and the general public should realize what unfavorable consequences migration might bring to some people and make sufficient efforts to mitigate the negative social impact of migration on the most important social institutions, like family, work, community etc. The national accumulation of specific knowledge on the abovementioned issues is a particular importance. So future scholarly research on migration in Georgia should focus on these issues.

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